

# *DROSERA PETIOLARIS* THE WOOLY SUNDEW

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*Drosera petiolaris*, or the wooly sundew, as it is commonly called, is a very handsome CP making its home in tropical Northern Australia and New Guinea. The plant grows near lush rainforests in sandy and acid soil. There are several beautiful sundews which also inhabit these woodlands, but *D. petiolaris* is the oddest looking plant of them all.

Looking somewhat like a wheel spoke with little suns at the tips, it is a very hairy rosette. This rosette spreads up to 5 inches across with numerous layers of young and old dead leaves which hug the ground underneath. The leaf stalks vary in size and even in color. Some forms of *D. petiolaris* have wide stalks while others are very narrow like *D. intermedia*. These range in size from tiny 0.5 inch petioles to large ones measuring several inches. The color varies from a deep dark green to a bright red and even purplish hue. The leaves either grow into the air or prostrate themselves onto the wet ground.

The wooly flower is very attractive and large. There are abundant flowers being supported on an arching 10 inch scape which is also hairy and rather thick. Often, more than one flower scape appears per plant. In the terrarium with artificial light, the flowers produced no seed either using self-pollination or with my lending hand. Other growers whom I correspond with report no luck either in producing the precious seed. They grow their plants in greenhouses, terrariums and even outdoors. If someone knows the secret, please let us know! Though seed production is a problem, the flowers are as pretty as a Renoir painting, being dark pink or white with bright yellow-orange pollen heads protruding in the middle of the flower.

The best method of propagation is division of the rhizomes when the plant forms

clumps of two or three large plants. My plants usually grow two new plants on the sides of the parent plant. These grow vigorously and very fast, but without traps. The plant is using much of its energy to produce new roots and young growth. When the young plants are divided, they return to producing traps.

Lifting the wooly up with its ball of soil around the roots, place the plant on your worktable. Gently, remove the soil from the roots by dipping into a bowl of rain water. While you're working on the plant, make sure roots do not dry out completely. To prevent drying out, keep dipping the roots in the bowl of rainwater often. When a plant is disconnected from the parent plant, place the roots gently into the rainwater leaving the plant on the rim of the bowl. Be careful not to get the fresh cut foliage too wet or rot will set in. Now, when you look at your plant, you will see that the three or more different growths are tightly connected. They are bulberous with many fragile, blackish-pinkish roots. It's alright to cut some leaves off near each connection to get a better view of individual plants. With clean scissors, cut off completely one plant with a few roots attached. Make sure that you have at least one good, long root remaining intact. Continue to divide until the clump is free of attachments. Now, place the individual plants back into the terrarium or pot, leaving room enough for a 6-inch spread. Within a month, the new plants will be growing vigorously, and you can clip off all undesirable and deformed leaves letting the normal ones fill the scene.

This process of dividing can be repeated often for *D. petiolaris* and the excess plants can be given away, traded or sold. This species is new to cultivation and I'm sure that most CP growers would love one. This helps conservation and eases the collecting



*D. petiolaris*, hairy form.

Photo by Joe Mazrimas

of wild specimens. I advocate trading plants with each other to acquire the various unique forms.

Cultivating this plant is simple if one respects the following growing conditions. Mine grow in 3 inches of Canadian peat moss with a 2 inch layer of dead sphagnum moss on the bottom for the roots to penetrate. I keep the soil fairly damp but not sopping wet. I seldom water them, for they grow nicely in a terrarium which retains the right moisture. I use rainwater only, or mineral spring water, which is used to flush out salt build-up around the plants. I don't know of any specific disease which could affect the woolly, but one should watch out for pests by using pieces of peststrip in the vicinity of the plants. The temperature around my plants is warm, around 65°-70°F in winter and 75°-100°F or higher in the summer. A warm, contrasting temperature all year is good for the plant.

If one uses artificial lighting, place the plants about 10 inches from the lamps using

one bulb of Gro-lux type and one cool-white bulb. This combination gives off a full spectrum of light for healthy, new growth and many blooms. The lights should be switched on for a 16-hour day throughout the year, for there is no dormancy period. I keep the humidity high with the glass cover slightly opened to provide adequate ventilation.

*D. petiolaris* eat the smallest of prey, fruit-flies and other tiny insects. One can feed them by hand some minute bits of dried Tubiflex worms but it's best to not overdo it by feeding them one trap per plant per week. The leaf blade, or its tentacles, show little movement in response to food which is so obvious in other *Drosera* like *D. capensis* or *D. prolifera*.

This wonderful, delightful plant species is one of God's most handsome of all the sundews which is rarely written about but certainly deserves attention. The name, "sundew," fits perfectly—with its little "suns" waiting patiently for the next meal!